Still in Prison

Convict Really Innocent?

In Mexico At Time Of Crime

Nearly a year ago, prisoner No. 101-475 read a story written by William R. Teague of the UPI Ohio staff and wrote him a letter. Teague spent his day off at Ohio Penitentiary talking with the man. Months of letter writing and phone calls produced this exclusive story.

By WILLIAM R. TEAGUE

COLUMBUS, Ohio (UPI)—John C. Michoff is serving the third year of a 10-to-25-year sentence for a $2,500 armed robbery he apparently did not commit.

A three-judge panel convicted Michoff of the robbery of Ray Krempa at Toledo, Ohio, on the night of Dec. 28, 1955. Evidence gathered by this writer indicates Michoff was some 3,000 miles away—at Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico—at the time of the robbery for which he was convicted.

GOVERNOR TOLD

The mystery of Michoff's unsuccessful battle for freedom so intrigued attorney George T. Gareff that he took the case without fee.

Evidence that should shed light on the case was delivered to Governor Michael V. Disalle, whose office has launched an investigation.

Michoff was arrested after an anonymous phone call July 26, 1956. He pleaded innocent—and insisted for more than five months that he was not guilty. He was sent to prison Dec. 21, 1956.

COURT RECORD

Documented evidence gathered from Mexico by this writer shows Michoff was in a minor traffic accident at Mazatlan with Ralph Baas of Perkiomenville, Pa., and Joseph Gagnon. The accident was Dec. 26, 1955. At 10 a.m. Dec. 29, 1955, Michoff appeared as a witness for Baas in Mazatlan traffic court. Michoff, Baas and Gagnon signed the court record in front of witnesses. This was about 10 hours after the robbery. It is impossible to get from Toledo to Mexico in such a short time by commercial flight. Airport records at Mazatlan show no private planes landed the day after the robbery.

Baas and Gagnon, now in the U.S. army, both say that Michoff was with them during the time of the Krempa robbery. The governor's legal advisor has asked for sworn statements from them.

Joe Jan, who prosecuted Michoff, said Michoff is trying to trick the state. He charged that Michoff pleaded guilty knowing he was innocent.

Michoff said, "What could I do? I pleaded innocent for five months. I had no money to hire a lawyer. Two detectives came to my cell one night. They threatened to send my wife back to Mexico if I didn't co-operate. They said I would get it easy if I would plead guilty.

WIFE THREATENED

"I was afraid. My wife was in the hospital getting ready to have our son. I was afraid they would move her. It might kill her and the baby both. I pleaded guilty."

Records show Michoff changed his plea the night of Dec. 14, 1956. His son, John Michael, was born the next day.

OTTAWA (CP)—Lester B. Pearson, one of the architects of NATO, warned Wednesday that unity and non-military co-operation among the Atlantic nations must be strengthened or the coalition "will go the way of other military alliances."

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